

## Playing to type: Casting, 'industry' and 'invisible training' in the National Youth Theatre's 'Playing Up 2'

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**Abstract:** Alongside its core actor and stage technician training activities, the National Youth Theatre of Great Britain runs a number of additional training programmes, targeting specific 'marginalised' groups. These are usually offered free of charge to participants. This article examines the 2009/10 iteration of the social inclusion actor training programme 'Playing Up 2' (subsequently suspended and reinstated as 'Playing Up'), drawing on a period of rehearsal observation and interviews I carried out during and after the final showcase performance *The Block*. This new writing project was set on a fictional London housing estate and the play included several stereotypical archetypes of inner-city, working class characters (the black drug dealer, the mentally ill young racist, the benefit claiming single mother). In this article, I begin by considering the politics of casting in *The Block* project; I then focus on how the notion of 'social inclusion' mediated participants' understanding of the relationship between their personal and professional identities. I demonstrate how asking young people to embody stereotypes closely related to their 'real' identities caused significant tensions within the training process — exacerbated by the 'socially excluded' label given to the Playing Up 2 participants. I reveal how the organisation of the programme and interactions with tutors operated as 'invisible' elements of the training process, reinforcing the ideas about 'industry' that students were exposed to in the curriculum.

**Keywords:** actor training, social inclusion, race, class, casting

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*'Nah,' Joye says, kissing his teeth, shaking his head and leaning back to balance precariously on the hind legs of his chair, 'I don't agree with that.'*

*The director takes a deep breath and speaks levelly, through a smile. 'Well. What do you think then?'*

*'I dunno.'*

*'You've got to give me something Joye.'*

*'I'm just saying,' Joye waves his hand dismissively towards the script, 'why's he gotta be a drug dealer for?'*

*The director sighs and turns to face the rest of group. This is the moment for a wider lesson. 'As an actor, you have to work from the script. You start with the script and you get your clues from there – that's how you build a character. That's your job, as an actor. Your job as a professional. Look at the script. What clues does it give you?'*

*'Just because he's black you reckon he's a drug dealer?'*

*'I'm not saying he's a drug dealer. I'm saying: he hasn't got a job, he's taking care of his sister, he has to be making ends meet somehow. So, you tell me: how's he doing it?'*

*'I dunno.'*

*'And he has a gun.'*

*Joye shrugs.*

*'The most logical explanation is that he's a drug dealer.'*

*'Fuck that, man!'*

*'Joye!'*

*'Nah. Fuck that.'*

*'We can't have that kind of language in the rehearsal room!'*

*'I'm leaving then' Joye says, storming from the studio, knocking the chair to the floor and slamming the door behind him.*

*There is a moment of silence. We all stare at the closed door until the director scans the group, shrugs and turns to Aalim, who is next in the circle. 'Right,' he says. 'Aalim, let's look at your character.'*

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The scene narrated above details my recollection, reconstructed from observation notes, of a rehearsal for *The Block*, a new play developed as the final showcase performance for the National Youth Theatre of Great Britain's (NYT) 2009/10 Playing Up 2 (PU2) programme. PU2 was a social inclusion actor training programme designed to offer a platform into Higher Education or the theatre industry for people aged 19-24 not in education, employment or training (NEETS). Twenty participants were recruited from agencies working in collaboration with the NYT, such as Cardboard Citizens, The (Camden) Roundhouse, and from NYT membership — all were considered 'socially excluded' according to risk factors outlined by the NYT in their quality audit (2013, discussed in more detail below). The course offered a foundation level actor training with a focus on performance technique (movement, voice, character work and scene study), an introduction to the theatre industry through projects led by professional directors, and showcase performances to which agents and casting directors were invited. PU2 also had an academic element: students were expected to complete portfolios on project work, study influential theatre practitioners and undertake a research project. I have begun this article by recounting the above scene because it illustrates some of the key tensions I noticed in the rehearsal process and resonates with themes that emerged in the follow-up

interviews I undertook as part of my research into the performance process for *The Block*.

As I watched the argument between Joye<sup>1</sup> and the director unfold, I was profoundly uncomfortable. Although his manner was extremely antagonistic, I felt that Joye had a point: he wanted to question dominant stereotypes of young, black males — which he was being asked to reinforce in performance. As Ashley Thorpe argues, '[c]asting concerns the objectification of bodies' (2014, p.437). The roles we ask actors to play have social consequences — during training, how students are cast in showcase performances conveys profound messages about the kinds of roles they might play 'professionally', and how they will be positioned in and by the industry. Stuart Hall has illustrated how representations of race, ethnicity, class and gender are important — constituting 'an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture' (1997 p.15). Jami Rogers (2013) contends that despite an ostensible acceptance of so-called 'colour-blind' casting practices, where an actor's race is not taken into account in casting processes, there is a 'glass ceiling' for actors of colour (p.407), who are rarely cast in leading classical theatre roles. She cites actor Nathaniel Martello-White, who wrote that he and his black actor friends were frequently asked to audition for roles in which they played 'the drug dealer, or the guy done good from a broken home' (Rogers 2013, p.410), to illustrate how pervasive, negative stereotypes of black culture permeate contemporary casting practices and limit opportunities for actors of colour.

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, the names of participants have been changed.

Thus Joye's objection to his character's drug dealing occupation was grounded in established arguments surrounding race and representation, and might have been considered a timely reflection on the prevailing norms of the acting industry. In the moment he raised his objection to his character's drug dealing identity, I felt there was an opportunity for the director to facilitate a productive discussion about the wider politics of casting. Instead, Joye's legitimate concerns were ignored by deflecting the discussion back to a focus on craft under the dubious guise of 'professionalism'.

In turning away from Joye during the exchange recounted above, the director facilitated his exclusion from the group — shortly after this exchange, Joye was asked to leave the PU2 programme. The power-dynamics in play at this moment served to underpin the participants' emerging understandings about the acting industry and its inherent power dynamics: who gets to decide how people are represented, how they behave and what their bodies come to symbolise. Although structures of power are rarely directly addressed as intrinsic parts of formal actor-training processes — and were certainly not part of the PU2 curriculum — students nonetheless absorb understandings about how the 'professional industry' works, and about how they are seen and understood by the wider professional world during their training. The ways that courses are organised, the opportunities students are afforded, the relationships they are encouraged to build with their teachers and the wider material conditions of training programmes form an important, 'invisible' training, in which students come to understand how they might navigate the acting profession.

David Eulus Wiles (2010), writing about university actor training programs in the US, has argued that training which reinforces industry norms limits the opportunity for students to challenge dominant orthodoxies. He proposes that students regularly absorb images from mass media during their education and use these to frame themselves in relation to industry (p.133). During PU2 and in my follow-up interviews, students spoke, formally and informally, about their ‘casting’— by which they meant ‘casting type’; how they would be understood and categorised by the ‘industry’, and how they should best position themselves within that industry to stand the best chances of employment.

What does it mean when we ask students to unquestioningly maintain ‘industry norms’? How do outreach and inclusion training programmes, ostensibly designed to overcome social divisions, work with as well as against the excluding systems they attempt to address? What does it mean when industry standards require actors from minority and disenfranchised groups to participate in re-creating representations that might work to sustain their disadvantage? What role does training play in maintaining the status quo? This article considers these questions in the context of *The Block*, considering the ways in which the organisational practices and culture of the NYT permeate into the day-to-day delivery of their programmes, constituting an invisible training that serves to shore up existing social divisions.

### The National Youth Theatre, PU2 and *The Block*

The National Youth Theatre (NYT) is a widely well-regarded organisation, based in the UK, that offers theatre training in acting and technical stage craft to young people aged between 14-25. Training is most frequently delivered through the core

membership programme, in which members pay<sup>2</sup> to attend a summer training residential and, on completion of the summer courses, can audition for company performances, which are frequently performed in professional theatre venues. In order to facilitate access for lower income members, the company offers competitive bursaries to cover the cost of their core programme. The NYT also delivers training through masterclass courses, open for a fee to members and non-members<sup>3</sup>, and education outreach and social inclusion programmes, which are usually provided free of charge. Although discussions of actor training in the UK often focus on University and Conservatoire training, the NYT plays a prominent role in preparing young people for the professional industry and counts an impressive number of prominent actors, directors and producers amongst its alumni<sup>4</sup>. The company has a national media profile: their work is regularly featured in national news broadcasts, arts programmes and newspapers (see BBC 2014, Clark 2012, Dunbar 2012, Elkin 2015).

*The Block* was commissioned, produced and directed by the NYT under the auspices of the PU2 and Wordplay programmes. Wordplay was a competition inviting new writers under 25 years of age to submit a full-length script for consideration; the two winning entries were offered expert mentoring from established playwrights and a fully-realised performance staged by PU2 participants in a professional theatre venue. PU2, which ran from 2008 until 2012, when it was

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<sup>2</sup> Courses for 2017 ranged from £450 to £989. Accommodation is charged at between £465 and £950 (NYT 2017).

<sup>3</sup> In April 2017 six-day masterclasses in Acting for Screen, Audition Technique and Performing Shakespeare were advertised on the NYT's website for between £299 and £329 (NYT 2017).

<sup>4</sup> The NYT's website lists alumni as including actors Dame Helen Mirren, Daniel Craig, Colin Firth, Rosamund Pike, Daniel Day-Lewis, Orlando Bloom, Catherine Tate, Sir Ben Kingsley and Sir Derek Jacobi (NYT.org.uk 2016).

suspended due to financial concerns<sup>5</sup>, was part of the NYT's 'social inclusion' programme. This social inclusion programme ran alongside but separately to the NYT's core membership work. There were twenty students enrolled onto the PU2 course, and they were split into two groups of ten for the final performances. I spent a period of time during June 2010 observing and eventually participating in (by facilitating a workshop) the rehearsal process for *The Block*, a play following the lives of residents living on a fictional social housing estate. The Block was positioned as an 'industry standard' performance reflecting what the director referred to as 'real world' practice. In the rehearsal room, as well as in the later interviews, there was an understanding among participants that the experience adhered to conventional industry standards.

Four months after the study was completed, as I began to reflect in writing on the performance and its outcomes, I realised that it was necessary to re-visit the participants and conduct interviews to discover what the longer-term impact of the performance process had been. Within an analysis of the process, the voices of the young people, and the gatekeepers such as the director and director of education at the NYT, were necessary in order to unlock the intricacies of the project. The interviews were structured as one-to-one open discussions which sought to uncover the participants' reflections on and memories of the rehearsal process, and the long-term impact of PU2 on their professional lives.

### The National Youth Theatre, Social Exclusion Discourse and 'Invisible Training'

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<sup>5</sup> In 2011 it was widely reported in the national media that the NYT was facing severe financial challenges due to funding cuts and an administration error, which left the company with debts of £650,000 (see Clark 2012, Dunbar 2012).



The term 'social inclusion' is part of the 'social exclusion' discourse that, as Lisa McKenzie has explained, developed out of debates surrounding inequality in France from the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> Initially these debates viewed exclusion as the 'breakdown of the structural, cultural, and moral ties which bind a society', and eventually as a way to define 'groups who had become marginalised, economically, socially or culturally' (McKenzie 2009, p.27). It was absorbed into the popular British consciousness during the New Labour period (1997-2010), when social exclusion became central to emerging policies that sought to find ways to fight the structural causes of inequality (McKenzie 2009, p.31-32). Thus social exclusion is the social phenomenon used to describe certain conditions produced by inequality, while social inclusion refers to the policy objectives concerned with addressing conditions of inequality. For example, 'social inclusion' is a core equality and diversity agenda emerging from the Equalities Act (2010) (Hyder and Tissot 2011).

'Social exclusion' is, however, as Burchardt et al. (2002) recognise, a contested term, applied to cover a wide spectrum of states of inequality (p.1-12). So too, as McKenzie (2009) has argued, the term has become contentious in its application because it forms part of a 'discourse of social exclusion' which works to identify injustice and, paradoxically, — because it operates from within existing structures of inequality — to create and maintain disadvantage. As Michael Etherton and Tim Prentki (2006) point out, notions of social exclusion have proved especially contentious for those working in applied and educational theatre contexts, where the 'impact' of a project tends to be superficially measured against 'whether an excluded group now considers itself to be included' (p.148) and where 'it is much rarer for any

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<sup>6</sup> Parts of this article expand a shorter piece I wrote for the journal *Research in Drama Education* (Beswick 2015).

assessment to be made about whether the marginal group has made any impact upon attitudes or behaviour in so-called mainstream society' (p.148-149). Because the NYT sought to address PU2 participants' social exclusion by altering their status as NEETS, the aims of the project resonate with contemporary social exclusion discourse developed under New Labour, where there is a focus on gaining skills which will lead to 'the kinds of opportunities necessary to enter and compete in the modern labour market' (McKenzie 2009, p.32).

According to the PU2 Quality Audit covering the years 2008 to 2012 (NYT 2013), all participants in the programme were considered by the NYT to be 'young people at risk' of health and behavioural problems that might negatively interfere with life chances. Such health and behavioural problems include criminal activity, lack of formal academic qualifications, drug and alcohol abuse, and underage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (NYT 2013 p.1-2). The 'risk factors' which classify individuals as 'socially excluded' are identified by 'low income and poor housing', 'disadvantaged neighbourhood' and 'high turnover and lack of neighbourhood attachment' (NYT 2013, p.2). The NYT attempts to overcome the specified 'risk factors' by fostering positive relationships among participants, between participants and staff, and, centrally, by equipping the participants with skills that will enable them to gain qualifications and enter employment or Higher Education. It is clear therefore, that the company recognises that organisational elements and individual relationships feed into training structures at a more or less 'invisible level' — by which I mean unarticulated in official curricular, but nonetheless permeating and underpinning the learning process.

However, despite the NYT's ambitions to 'include' the PU2 participants, several of the participants I spoke with implied that they felt labelled as 'different' by their 'social inclusion' status. This was compounded by the fact that the PU2 course was delivered separately to the 'core' programme, recreating divisions that existed between participants of the two programmes in the wider world. Emma and Charlie, for example, told me that they felt the PU2 programme was explicitly aimed at 'working class' participants, unlike the core programme which they understood to be made up of people from overwhelmingly 'middle class' backgrounds. The terms 'middle class' and 'working class' are of course contentious; they are by no means fixed categories into which people can be unproblematically grouped — in this context, however, they were categories the participants used to identify themselves and others in terms of opportunity facilitated by income and the location of their family home. In other words, what the NYT identified as 'risk factors' the participants understood as 'being working class'. As scholars including Bev Skeggs (2005), Stephanie Lawler (2005) and Lisa McKenzie (2015) have illustrated, 'working class' is a loaded term, signifying a stigmatised category of people who are subject to negative stereotyping that serves to create them as 'other' to middle class interests and values. When the participants referred to themselves as 'working class' the term implied the way they were (negatively) positioned by the NYT in relation to core company members.

**Emma:** Like by NYT standards I am working class.

**Katie:** So what do you think NYT standards are?

**Emma:** Well, more people [in the core NYT programme] are from middle, even upper middle class, backgrounds. Probably not that many people who are doing the development for *Tits/Teeth* [a core NYT project] were moaning about expenses because they're on benefits and don't have enough money to get there. Or they're taking a week off work and it's actually drastically

affecting their standard of living for that week. Like most people probably would be able to have their parents support them.

Participant Charlie rolled his eyes when I asked him whether he felt that he and his colleagues were socially excluded or at risk, and implied that the NYT, as an ostensibly middle class institution had different ideas about class privilege than he did.

**Charlie:** I wouldn't say that they — I wouldn't say that they were at risk or socially excluded, because they weren't — they weren't really — they were all, all of their families were earning a reasonable income, they were all living comfortably, whereas the previous year [that the PU2 course ran] people were, a lot of people were finding a place to stay, had been homeless, a lot of like — there were a lot more extreme circumstances the previous year.

The NYT has a reputation for catering to middle class young people via its expensive core programme, as artistic director Paul Roseby acknowledged in an interview with the *Metro* (Allfree 2008). As such, it might be viewed as an example of the methods by which young people from different social circumstances are polarised — because of the cost implications of joining the NYT's core programme (including travel and expenses) and the cap on bursaries, young people from lower-income backgrounds are likely to have more limited access to the extracurricular provisions the NYT provides.

However, in 2008 the NYT publically declared that it aimed to 'bridge the gap' (Roseby in Allfree 2008) between young people from different social and economic backgrounds via its inclusion and education programmes. Because the NYT is a social space where young people physically gather, where they train together for

industry preparation, the company indeed has a potential role to play in fostering integration in an educational context between often polarised groups. However, the rhetoric of inclusion employed by the NYT, and the practices of the PU2 programme, echo the social divisions between advantaged and ostensibly disadvantaged young people that exist in wider society and permeate into divisions in the labour market (see e.g. Ball 2002). This, coupled with the economic inequality between participants in the core and outreach programmes means that 'inclusion' is difficult to achieve. Aalim, who had received a bursary and joined the NYT as a core member after taking part in PU2, told me that his economic circumstances affected his ability to engage fully in the core programme, despite being a member:

For example, they wanted me to do *Talking to Byron*, the knife crime project in Birmingham [run as part of the core programme]. They called *me* up, they emailed *me*, and they wanted me to get involved and I'm telling them: 'Alright, these are the dates, [but] I need money, I need to *work*'. Do you know what I'm trying to say? 'If you're gonna pay for my accommodation for staying up there, then I'll do it. Gladly.' So basically, they wanted me to pay for the travel, pay for the accommodation, pay for my expenses to stay there. Just to do a two-week programme!

Thus, while the NYT's PU2 programme might be viewed as a qualified success in terms of its impact on individual participants, many of whom did go on to university, further vocational training or to find employment in theatre-related contexts, the way in which the 'inclusion' agenda was articulated in official documents (particularly the identification of participants as 'at risk'), and the realities of PU2 members' economic

circumstances reveal an uncomfortable division between the core and social inclusion arms of the NYT. Divisions between participants in the core and social inclusion programmes operate to reflect the existing social divisions that lead to participants' 'exclusion' in the first place. If left unaddressed these divisions threaten to impact on participants' ability to enter and navigate a competitive labour market. Furthermore, in understanding themselves as 'different' and having this reinforced through divisive training programmes, the participants may begin to see and understand themselves in fixed terms, limiting their ability to challenge, innovate and take risks as they enter the 'industry'.

I found that participants' understandings about how they were positioned by the NYT fed into their perception of how they would be perceived by the acting industry at large. This included understanding of their 'casting'; that is, of the roles which they might be expected to play once working professionally. As participant Edna, a boyish young black woman, told me, 'if I was to do a play, the first thing that someone would think to look at me — some people would probably put me in a play where there's young people and knife crime'. Although they weren't explicitly told so, the opportunities they were given on the course and the structural conditions of their training operated invisibly to 'teach' them how to understand and orient themselves in relation to 'industry'.

The 'Joye' moment, then, stood out to me because it encompassed some of the concerns I'd had about the NYT's outreach programmes, sparked by conversations with participants and my own research and observations over the period that I worked with them. These students were not necessarily comfortable with the labels

they were given by the institution and the roles they were asked to play. As Charlie told me, he felt uneasy with the content of *The Block* and the ways it presented working-class characters:

I felt like it was a stereotypical portrayal of, erm, council estates [social housing]. I didn't really think it challenged anything, I didn't think it was very well structured, as a piece of writing, I didn't think it had enough focus as a piece of writing. I didn't think any of the characters were very well developed. And, in the end piece what we saw was an improvement of the initial piece, , where the characters felt a little bit more well rounded, but I still don't think even in the final production they were very well rounded.

The concerns regarding representation that underpinned Joye's frustration seemed to permeate through the NYT at an organisational level: apparent in the work I observed during rehearsal, in the interviews I conducted with participants and in the practices of the company in casting PU2 members in *The Block*.

### Stereotypes and 'Industry Norms'

*The Block* was set on a social housing estate; it centered around the character Barry, a racist young skinhead with an unnamed mental illness, who lived with his bitter, chain-smoking single mother<sup>7</sup>. Across the course of the play Barry encountered the residents of the estate, all of whom encompassed archetypal classed and raced stereotypes often depicted in popular representations in film, television and the newspaper press — these included an Arabic corner-shop owner and his wife, a black brother and sister involved in drug dealing, a mousy white nurse and a well-spoken priest. At the end of the play, a mystical character, 'X', turns back time to stop a shooting between gangster Daffy (played by Joye) and his sister

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<sup>7</sup> See Beswick (2011) and Beswick (2015) for more details on the performance.

Angela (played by Edna).

Throughout the play, the life circumstances of the performers pressed uncomfortably against the narratives of the characters they played. This was not only because members of distinct class and ethnic groups were cast as stereotypical characters (drug dealers, corner shop owners, skinheads) but because there were parallels between the story and the conditions of some of the actors' lives. Barry's chain-smoking single mother, for example, was played by a young woman who was in 'real life' pregnant and not in a relationship with the father. The industrial space of the Southwark Playhouse's studio theatre was almost completely bare apart from the bodies of the actors. The estate 'block' was depicted by grey concrete bricks marking its corners at the edges of the stage space. The performing bodies became the frames through which the story was communicated. This served to suggest that the depictions on stage had a relationship with the 'real' world of young black and working class people. The young NEETs played out a conception of the troubled low income inner-city environment to a paying audience including core NYT members, invited industry stakeholders (such as agents and casting directors) and members of the public. The bodies on stage emphasised the inclusion aspect of the project: this was work by and about troubled young people who were overcoming their social exclusion via participating in art.

Compounding the problematic relationship between the participants' 'real lives' and their casting was the concept of the 'theatre industry', evoked throughout the project by references to 'professionalism' and 'industry' during rehearsals and workshops. The fictional representation of low income inner-city residents offered in *The Block*



mirrors many of the pathological narratives about the working class and ethnic minorities that circulate in popular discourse, which contributed to the students' 'socially excluded' identity. Thus, *The Block* worked to reinforce the understanding participants had about how they were positioned by the wider world, and particularly the way they were seen or would be seen within the theatre industry. Because of the relationship between the participants and the subject matter of the play, the participants had begun to understand themselves and their embodied experiences as commodities, and *The Block* as the kind of vehicle through which they might market their life experience based on the skills and knowledge they had gained on the PU2 course. Although they had not explicitly been told that they would need to market their 'otherness', they had come to understand through the representational practices they took part in that their 'real' status (as black, working class, single mother etc.) was what they had to offer the 'industry'. Because this was a showcase performance in which the young people understood they were presenting themselves to industry, their bodies became uncomfortable 'site[s] of semiotic meaning' (Thorpe 2014: 437); through which they signaled an acceptance of the status quo in representational practices. The course allowed no room for resistance.

### 'Professionalism'

As outlined at the beginning of this article, I observed a rehearsal where the director became involved in a heated argument with Joye. When I asked interview participants to reflect on the argument I'd witnessed they noted that Joye had been difficult throughout the process, something the director mentioned to me during rehearsals, and which was obvious from his engagement and demeanour within the group. He had missed several sessions, consistently turned up late and was

antagonistic and argumentative with members of the cast, the director and other staff on the PU2 course. However, despite this ongoing antagonism, interviews with other participants indicated there was a genuine discomfort with the roles he was being asked to play, suggesting his attitude emerged from a sense of powerlessness in the face of accepted representational norms. Edna noted that Joye had been uncomfortable with roles he had been cast in in the past. 'It goes back to one of the first plays that we did,' she told me. 'Which was the knife crime one. And he never wanted to be in that as well because he thought of it being a [stereo]typical, as I said "on the block" sorta play.'

Reflecting on his impression of the Joye incident, Aalim explained:

This is how it was: [the director] was telling him, 'as far as I know, what I'm judging from the text' — cause that's all you've got to use to make your character, the text — 'What I'm judging from the text, he's holding a wrapped object, he's living just him and his little sister, how's he making money? He must be doing something criminal, so he's selling drugs'. And [Joye] was saying 'I don't believe that, why, just cause he's black and he's young?' He goes, 'just cause he's black why's should he be selling drugs, that's a stereotype'. And then [the director] was telling him, 'Alright, give me something to work with then'. And he goes: 'I can't think of something on the spot'.

Joye's discomfort with embodying black male stereotypes resonate with Shelia Preston's reflections on her own drama workshops with 'excluded' black youths in the institutional context of the school environment, where the macro realities of the relationship between race and power were present in the micro interactions of the workshop environment. She argues that:

The language of the 'official' discourse, where everyone is treated equally, regardless of ethnic background, presents a colour-blind contradiction where difference is effectively 'dissolved into a melting pot...of culture'.

(Preston 2011, p.256)

Aalim told me he was affronted by Joye's behaviour. He felt that challenging the director in a direct way was 'unprofessional'; Aalim implied that confrontation was not acceptable in the rehearsal room and that he understood acceptance of the status quo as an important facet of preparing to enter the theatre industry.

[H]e just wasn't professional. At all. Seriously, he just kept arguing. He even argued with [Emma]. She was telling him exactly what I was describing to you, telling him '[The director's] not telling you he's a drug dealer, he's telling you that's what he's getting from the text, so can you help him make it something else?'

This idea that 'professionalism' involves acquiescence to troubling power dynamics emerged as part of the training as students' behavior — including protests at casting, expressing discomfort with the content of plays they performed in, swearing, arriving late, wearing the 'wrong' type of clothing — was monitored and sanctioned by NYT staff. At an 'invisible' level students were conditioned to understand and accept ways of being which enabled them to 'fit in' with the prevailing norms of the NYT as an institution, and the NYT's conception of the acting industry at large.

In my interview with *The Block's* director, he told me that he was sympathetic to Joye's views, which he described as 'interesting' and 'perhaps justified', but emphasised that Joye was difficult to work with: late and uncommitted to the process. The director told me it was difficult to know how much Joye really disagreed

with characterisation and how much he was being antagonistic; he said that Joye had struggled with the course from the start. The director explained to me that he was upset when Joye was eventually asked to leave the PU2 course as he knew this was denying a young person of training and a recognised qualification, but at the same time, he needed to move project forward for others involved.

Although I do not wish to personally attack the director of the project, who was clearly working within institutional constraints, his statements illustrated the ways in which one participants' unwillingness or inability to conform to the norms and standards set for 'professional practice' contributed to his exclusion. Common stereotypes used to denigrate young black males (lazy, uncommitted, aggressive) became justifications for his exclusion; illustrating the ways in which negative stereotypes work in a perpetuating cycle when the structural issues that contribute to the exclusion and marginalisation of 'excludable types' are not addressed.

The reluctance to acknowledge that the relationships between race and power were affecting Joye's ability to participate functionally in the project highlights tensions at the heart of the PU2 programme, which resonate with tensions in the acting industry at large (see e.g. Rogers 2013, Thorpe 2014, Chow 2014). The results of this reluctance to engage with resistance had significant consequences for the individual involved. The Quality Audit highlights Joye's behaviour as the catalyst for his expulsion and makes no reference to his dissatisfaction with institutional processes, or suggestions as to how the company might respond to the concerns he rose. The NYT eventually found another young black male to play Joye's role who expressed no objections to the representation.

## Conclusion

When we cast our students according to industry stereotypes we say a great deal to our audiences and our students who we believe is good or evil and who deserves or does not deserve love, respect, compassion. Industry norms involve 'pointing' us using the visual cues (including casting) evident towards certain ways of seeing.

(Wiles 2010, p.131)

As I mentioned at the start of this article the PU2 course has been disbanded. Indeed, there have been many changes to the infrastructure of the NYT since my research project finished in 2012. The series of social inclusion courses which the company ran from 2007 — including weekly drop-in sessions, Playing Up 1, RePlay and PU2 — were dissolved and re-established under a single course 'Playing Up', which is similar to PU2 in its aims and structure. A 'REP course', offering a year long, intensive actor training free of charge to fifteen talented young people from any economic background was launched in 2012. These changes appear to have been directly prompted by a change in policy direction and funding priorities since the end of the New Labour government in 2010. While social inclusion had been central to the New Labour agenda, where policy directives included a focus on the expansion of Higher Education and prioritising access for lower income students, the Coalition and Conservative governments have prioritised vocational training, with an emphasis on work — as evidenced by a commitment to providing three million new apprenticeships between 2015 and 2020 (see Grimshaw and Rubery 2012, Delebarre 2016).

The NYT's institutional agenda is, like the agenda of many training providers, responsive to policy and presumably underpinned by concerns about sustainability. Although PU2 no longer exists, it is useful to revisit the programme in hindsight

because it allows a contextualisation of the work within a particular socio-political context, within a specific contemporary period. While there is nothing wrong with ensuring the sustainability of the institutions we work and learn in, and while there is a place for preparing our students for the job markets they will enter, it is also important in a time of precarity, where we must prove the value of our work by narrating it against external measures, to remind ourselves of the kinds of classrooms we want to create. Our students' practice will, in a variety of ways shape the industries we prepare them for and the societies they live in. What responsibilities do we have as educators towards our students? How can we create environments where individuals from different backgrounds feel respected, accepted and powerful? And how might we develop our students' critical minds so that they can challenge and innovate through theatre practice?

In a recent interview discussing teaching and learning in Higher Education, literature scholar Paul Gilroy spoke about the difficulty of addressing issues of identity within a culture where fear of negative evaluation reigns. Reflecting on the pervasive notion that classrooms should be a 'safe space' where students feel unthreatened, Gilroy argued that: 'Within the confines of my professional responsibilities and my "duty of care" I prefer the idea of my classroom as a dangerous space' (Gilroy and Bechler 2016). Although Gilroy was not speaking about actor training, his concept of a 'dangerous space', where students might both provoke and feel provoked, where resisting the status quo, even angrily, is encouraged, provides a starting point for a philosophy of critical resistance that has the potential to foster critical teaching and learning in actor training contexts. An uncritical emphasis on 'industry' in training programmes encourages students to accept prevailing conditions and orthodoxies, and arguably reinforces structural conditions which result in the stereotyping and

marginalization of 'excludable types'. Creating dangerous spaces, spaces where confrontation and contestation are encouraged — where students might not feel safe, but where they feel powerful and heard — may enable our students to defy the status quo and explore new ways of seeing and of being seen, on stage and beyond.

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